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MAXWELL/GUNTER NEWS

By Carl Bergquist
Dispatch Staff Writer

"Hello everybody. I'm Hank Erwin coming to you live from one of Montgomery's highlights," Alabama State Senator Hank Erwin told his radio audience Wednesday. The occasion was his daily radio show. The place was the Enlisted Heritage Hall at Gunter.

He said he decided to do the show from Gunter to promote the 60th anniversary of the Air Force, and to also recognize the 62nd anniversary of his father, Staff Sergeant Henry "Red" Erwin, receiving the Medal of Honor on April 12, 1945. During World War II, Sergeant Erwin carried an ignited phosphorous flare to the cockpit of the aircraft he was aboard and disposed of it through the co-pilot's window before the flare could destroy the aircraft. He was so badly burned during his heroic actions that he received the medal in his hospital bed for fear he would not live long enough for a formal ceremony.

"There is a bond between just about everyone in the Air Force because they all attended school at Maxwell-Gunter," Senator Erwin said. "Enlisted training goes on here at Gunter, and EHH will bring tears to your eyes with its exhibits about the enlisted Air Force, and for me personally, the great exhibit about my father."

The senator's first guest was 42nd Air Base Wing Commander, Col. Paul McGillicuddy, who said Montgomery and the River Region was a great place to live and work, and Maxwell-Gunter has a great relationship with the local communities.

"It's my pleasure to be on your radio show today to tell you about Maxwell-Gunter," he said. "Gunter is the Air Force's home of enlisted education, and we have four distinct enlisted schools at the base. Every year more than 30,000 Air Force members come through Maxwell-Gunter for training."

Senator Erwin said people often ask him if he served in the military, and he tells them he did not due to an injury he received in college that made him ineligible to serve.

"So, I do the next best thing I can and make it my great responsibility to try and take care of our military members and veterans," he said. "That is what this show does: bleed red, white and blue." His second guest, Chief Master Sgt. Malcolm McVicar, Enlisted Heritage Research Institute director, said EHH was to honor enlisted service to the country and tell the story of how enlisted personnel have contributed to the success of the Air Force. EHH falls under the direction of EHRI. "We get thousands of visitors to the museum every year, and they are a very diverse group of people. They range from individuals and couples to school and civic groups, and they come to see the museum and understand the enlisted corps," he said. "I've circled the globe with the men and



Alabama State Senator Hank Erwin talks with William Chivale, Enlisted Heritage Hall curator, and Chief Master Sgt. Malcolm McVicar, Enlisted Heritage Research Institute director, during his radio show Wednesday.

-- Photo by Carl Bergquist

women of the United States military, and the enlisted troops are extremely good at doing their jobs.”

Chief McVicar said American military members are also compassionate to a fault, and it is nothing for them to “give the shirts off their backs” to those in need.

Senator Erwin said EHH has played a great role in the lives of his family members, and he told EHH Curator William Chivalette that he wanted to thank him and EHH personally for his father’s exhibit.

“I want to salute you and everyone involved because EHH gives visitors such a great taste of Air Force enlisted heritage,” he said. “We [the show] want to do everything we can at the state level to take care of our veterans.”

Part of the show involves Senator Erwin taking telephone calls from listeners, and one caller addressed how badly veterans coming back from Vietnam were treated.

“If you meet a vet from the Vietnam War, shake his or her hand and thank them for their service. It is the right thing to do,” the senator said. “This is something they never received when they came home from the war in Southeast Asia.”

Mr. Chivalette said as an Army volunteer who served in Vietnam, he was “shaken and confused” by the attitude of many Americans when he returned from the war.

“I had a bad incident in the San Francisco, Calif., airport when I got back. I was spat upon and someone splattered my uniform with paint,” he said. “I’m glad that is not the reception our troops are getting today when they return.”

Senator Erwin concluded his show by saying Alabama and Maxwell-Gunter play a “great role” in affecting the rest of the world, and it was his pleasure to talk about that.

“EHH is inspiring to see,” he said. “I strongly urge everyone who is listening to make an effort to come and see this museum.”

The senator said his radio show reaches about two-thirds of the state of Alabama, and because of its appreciation of the military, is “greatly appreciated” by the listeners.

Senator Erwin has been doing radio and television programs for more than 30 years, and has done more than 3,000 episodes of his present show, or about 7,000 hours of air time. He has had more than 24,000 guests, and the show has won a national award and several local awards for excellence. Senator Erwin represents the 14th District of Alabama from Shelby County.